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Participatory and Conventional Research Methodologies

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Participatory and Conventional Research Methodologies

An Experiment with Integration as an Alternative Form of Research

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INDIAN SOCIAL INSTITUTE
New Delhi

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1

Introduction

Accustomed as they are to academic studies, most social scientists take the objective and value-free nature of research for granted. Within this perspective participant observation and survey methodology are considered objective. It is because the former is assumed to enable the researcher to get an inside view of a society without at the same time becoming part of that social group. The assumption is that this identity of being within a society without being part of it ensures objectivity since the members of a society are unable to look at themselves objectively. The participant observer is thus considered a person who can give a society feedback on itself, or, oftener still, give policy makers an objective view of a given society, without in any way allowing his/her personal, emotional or social attachment to the community to interfere with the data collected from the community studied. Similarly, the fact that a survey can quantify the data collected from a society confers on it an aura of objectivity.

Today, however, many scholars as well as social activists question the assumptions of traditional research. Some scholars question the concept of objectivity and ask whether an outsider can get fully into the ethos of a society. By saying this, these scholars do not belittle the role external researchers can play, but only question the sacredness attached to objectivity coming from outside. They also question the relevance of academic research from an ethical point of view. They ask

whether the scholar has the right to use the people as objects of his/her study without their getting any direct benefits. All the benefits and control remain with the external scholar (Mbilinji and Vuorela 1982: 307-308).

Social activists, on the contrary, view it as a political question, particularly the question of power. They look at the present research methodologies as an expression of the 'top-down' pattern of development in which assets, income, production and consumption are monopolised by a small minority. They ask whether the ownership of knowledge by a few scholars is one more way of controlling the majority to the benefit of the minority (Hollnsteiner 1982: 36-37). Besides, they do not see the relevance of a purely academic approach that does not lead to any social change. They feel that by speaking of objectivity, survey research oversimplifies reality; by not providing links to subsequent action, it goes against the principles of adult education and by keeping the monopoly of power to initiate studies and produce knowledge in the hands of external researchers, it is often alienating and even dominating or oppressive (Hall 1978: 5-7).

Participatory research (PR) is offered by many of them as an alternative to conventional research (CR) that reproduces a system of inequalities. But very few of them view it as the only alternative. Most of them know that it is a new approach only to the professional. Activists have been practising it much longer, without knowing the terminology (Tandon 1981: 24). Being a new concept, it is experimental and forms part of the search for alternatives to the present system (Fernandes 1980: xiv).

Because of its experimental nature, very few scholars view it as the only alternative. It is a major factor in the search for alternative models of knowledge and development, meant to transfer power to the hither to marginalised classes. Moreover, very few make a clear dichotomy between the CR and PR methodologies. While their basic approach differs, it is assumed that their methodologies can be combined, though very few have attempted such an integration. They feel that while a purely academic approach cannot be accepted, the role of theoretical analysis and of quantification should not be

underestimated. This becomes relevant particularly when one realises that in a participatory process research is a tool for social change. This change cannot stop at the micro-level but should reach the macro decision-makers who understand only the language of academic research.

These are the questions treated in this monograph. We begin with the main misgivings of scholars and activists concerning conventional research. We then go on to give the main features of participatory research which is offered by many scholars and activists as one possible alternative to the present method. We shall not go into details about the concepts and methodology of participation, since enough has been written on these subjects already (see for example Fernandes 1980; Fernandes and Tandon 1981; Kassam and Mustafa 1982; Hall, Gillette and Tandon 1982; Rahman 1984; UNRISD 1981, 1982, 1983 etc). Instead, we shall illustrate participatory research by discussing a few short cases. We shall then see the possibility of combining CR and PR methodologies. This will be done not in theory but by analysing three studies we did in 1983-1984. Two of these were done by the Indian Social Institute (ISI) and the other by the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA). After the study the two organisations evaluated each other's methodology and chapters III and IV are based on one such evaluation report. The monograph concludes with a few insights into the possible achievements, problems and dilemmas of PR.

2

Some Questions About Conventional Research

As stated in the introduction, a group of scholars as well as some social activists question either the assumptions or the relevance of conventional research. Their objections range from the possibility of total objectivity in research among human beings to the ethical question of using people as objects of study without any benefits accruing to them, and the political question of monopoly of power.

Main misgivings of scholars

The scholars disagree with the assumptions of conventional research about the researchers remaining outsiders to a society and not influencing it even after getting involved with it. They claim that social research is essentially a study of individuals and groups and in the process of studying the people, researchers share their humanity with the individuals they encounter. This very act tends to have some impact on the social system under study (Tandon 1981: 16).

This group of scholars who do not accept the possibility of objectivity would disagree with those who have traditionally assumed that the informant who talks to the researcher does not and cannot change as a result of the encounter with the scholar. Moreover, those who believe in objectivity even assume that social change is not the task of a researcher, except perhaps as one more subject of study. Traditional scholars think that the informant and the researcher cannot

change except perhaps to the extent that the informant usually belonging to an oppressed group and often having a low self-image, may get a higher social status or improve his self-image because of his contacts with the researcher who belongs to a higher social class than the person studied. To put it in the words of Hortense Powdermaker (1967: 296) one of Bronislaw Malinowski's well known students,

> The informant may receive some catharsis from talking about himself to a sympathetic stranger. But this is not usually the primary motivation; basically he is a teacher, informing the anthropologist, his student.

Some other scholars would discount the possibility of objectivity not merely in the society studied, but of the researcher himself. They would think that the scholar's ideology and interpretative faculties begin to function already at the stage of formulating the questionnaire for the study. As Gunnar Myrdal (1955: xv-xvi) states,

> There is an inescapable *a priori* element in all scientific work. Questions must be asked before answers can be given. The questions are all expressions of our interest in the world; they are at bottom valuations. Valuations are thus necessarily involved already at the stage when we observe facts and carry on theoretical analysis, and not only at the stage when we draw political inferences from facts and valuations.

Others doubt the objectivity of classical research because of the historical context in which the professional methodologies originated. A historical perspective is important, because, as Mydral has implied above, the methodology used determines the type of facts collected and the manner in which they are interpreted.

The historical background

In this context, some scholars with a historical bent of mind, try to identify the era within which a given methodology was born and the circumstances that led to its origin.

This aspect is of great importance because most methodologies commonly used in the social sciences originated in the colonial countries and were originally meant to study the colonised peoples in order to better control them. The study of anthropology, for example, began with the discovery of 'savage people' in the Americas, Asia and Africa. Initially most work would be done in the direction of collection of data about the customs and manners of the conquered peoples. It is because once Europeans decided to subjugate the peoples they had 'discovered', they had to learn the manners and customs of the conquered peoples in order to better control them. Scholars like J.A. (Abbe) Dubois (1906) who did not have political motives, would be typical of those who tried to understand the peoples they had come in contact with. Though they did not have political motives, their value system being essentially ethno-centric, they looked at Europeans as the only genuine humans and their culture as the real civilisation. The others could be accepted as human and civilised in as much as they had elements that brought them close to Europe. At a moment when Europe was attempting to present its economic exploitation of colonised peoples as 'civilising mission' the ethnocentric studies of scholars who remained 'politically neutral' provided the colonialist with the legitimation he required.

This outlook emerged from evolutionism that took hold of the European intellectual world by the mid-19th century. The fact that social sciences accepted such an ethnocentric classification of societies into primitive and advanced with European culture as the centre and criterion of civilisation was bound to turn social sciences into a handmaid of colonialism. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871) was the first major work in English which gave a definite form to the earlier works of the French Marquis de Condorcet's (1833) contention that God has not put limits on man's progress though some peoples have remained primitive. Condorcet added that others were at various stages of civilisation while the West alone had reached the most advanced stage and that progress would not stop at the industrial revolution as the conquest of the primitives by the civilised West made

obvious. Tylor's evolutionistic thinking dominated the world of social sciences and influenced even authors like Louis Morgan and Karl Marx.

From the initial study of the evolutionist school emerged the functionalist school which laid stress on data collection from a given society, as against recording of customs of the primitive peoples as was done till then. This data collection was done through participant observation of the scholar who lived in a society but remained only an observer and did not become a part of it. Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) gave this technique a definite form. Data were collected from what the individuals told the scholar about themselves. To this, the researcher added what he observed about the customs and behaviour of the people and complemented it with data on the folklore and magic formulae of the people.

The motive of this study was not to change society but only to understand it and become a specialist on a society which no one else had studied.

> Despite his close involvement with the people under study, the scholar's aim was to keep himself *detached* from them in order to secure an *objective* deseription of the society he was studying. The anthropologist was told to remove his personal biases as an observer, and was also warned against a temptation to become a sentimental champion of his primitives. In this way, despite the willingness to respect the humanness of the people, the anthropologist still reified and manipulated the society under study for his own purpose within the scientific community (Mbilinyi and Vuorela 1982: 310-311).

It was taken for granted that a detached view was essential for not disturbing the equilibrium of the society under observation. This was an essentially ahistorical view of society in the sense that the scholar took for granted that every society was in a state of equilibrium and that it should remain so. That even what the Western scholar considered primitive societies were in movement and were changing was not taken into consideration. If change was observed, it was attributed to contacts with the 'civilised' West. Hence the scholar

always made an effort to find a society not contaminated by Western influence (Powdermaker 1967: 43) and made every effort not to disturb the equilibrium. Thus without their realising it social scientists could easily become tools of *status quoism.*

Social Activists' view

The above objections to the methodology and assumptions of professional value-free research come primarily from scholars whose experience has shown that an ahistorical approach to the peoples and societies is not possible. Other objections come from social activists and from scholars committed to social change.

The uneasiness of this category is caused primarily by three considerations. The first of these is political in nature. Though the scholar is convinced of his non-partisan and objective approach, the agencies that have a vested interest in the continuation of a given situation or in manipulating a society to suit their needs, may use the scholar for their purpose without the researcher being aware of it. In other words, the *bona fides* of the scholar is not questioned, but only the consequences of accepting a methodology that appears ahistorical but may play into the hands of the powerful.

In the colonial times themselves, the colonialist used the studies to suit his needs. In India we have the example of the British rushing to translate the works of Abbe Dubois and giving him a lifetime pension in gratitude for the favour he had done them by putting at their disposal data about the customs of India which helped the colonial rulers better understand and govern the subordinate peoples. In Africa, Mbilinyi and Vuorela (1982: 312) give the example of Gory and Gulliver in Tanganyika and others elsewhere who were appointed government anthropologists. The fact that the ethno-centric assumptions of the scholar who took his own society as the criterion of civilisation and viewed the 'primitive' peoples according to European values, provided justification to colonialism and to its myth of 'civilising education'

though the scholar himself might not have been aware of the fact that anthropology was born as a result of colonial occupation. The government anthropologists played directly in the hands of the colonialist.

> In the context of the British policy of 'indirect rule' colonial authorities were very much concerned with the methods with which the people under their domination could be more effectively administered. 'Traditional' forms of government were to be accommodated to as well as distorted for this purpose. In actual fact the anthropologist became a professional in the colonialist situation, most explicitly when employed as 'government anthropologist' in the colonies (ibid).

In other words, the colonialist's role in using the social sciences to know more about the colonies in order to better control them has to be borne in mind, though the scholar himself often thought only in terms of going back to the primitive communities in order to better understand his own society.

Attitudes of scholars

Scholars and activists committed to social change see a similar danger in the attitudes of present day scholars in the context of the neo-colonial economy of the Third World. Some express the fear that uncritical acceptance of methodologies developed in the West can lead to continuing dependence on the rich countries. This dependence is made possible by the attitudes of the scholars, the capital-intensive methodologies and the funding pattern and the role played by multinational foundations.

To begin with the attitudes of scholars, I.P. Desai describes how even after more than three decades of Independence, Indian scholars are dependent for their status and acceptance on their links with the West. A large number of second generation sociologists who were formed in the West write more for British and American journals than for their peers in their own country. Morever, they hold positions of

power in the universities and institutes of research and influence the thinking of these institutions.

> For academic position a foreign degree or even a stay abroad without any degree, was considered more acceptable by the universities and they filled up many positions in the university departments. This new trend was reinforced by the visit of the foreigners to India, again a very large number from the United States and a smaller number from Britain (Desai 1981: 39)

In other words, foreigners set the standards of professionalism in social science research. As a result, methodologies are imported without studying the historical process that gave birth to a particular approach. Many studies have shown how the standards of professionalism set by these methodologies have in fact led to colonial control of institutions in the Third World. Zafarulla Chaudhury (1980: 17-21) gives one such example from the Bangladesh Cholera Research Laboratory which was to be turned into an International Institute for Health, Population and Nutrition Research. All money was to come from multinational foundations and research was to be dominated by foreign experts with little or no room for Bangladeshis. Its previous history too showed that little or no effort was made to train local scientists. Simultaneously, efforts were made through foreign scientists to influence the health policy of Bangladesh to create a market for American pharmaceutical and other products.

Another example is a leprosy eradication project in an East African country. "45% of the annual budget went for supporting eight European personnel, 22% on supporting 60 African personnel and only 1.5% on drugs. A glowing example of external resources obtaining criticality" (Fernandes and Tandon 1981: 6).

Briefly, because of the transfer of methodologies developed elsewhere to a developing country, and the consequent need of funds for the capital-intensive inputs, many institutions in the Third World are forced to depend on foreign aid for major research projects. The researchers may only be having scientific interests, but the foundations and the universities

may have other intentions. Prestige in American universities depends on the amount of research done. Funds are much more easily available from the foundations for research abroad than in the U.S.A. The need of the researcher to find experience which is not easily obtained at home, the university's need of funds and the poor health status in countries like Bangladesh, play in the hands of the multinational pharmaceutical companies "seeking to increase their profits and expand the market" (Chaudhury 1980: 17).

Together with control of Third World institutions by foreign scholars and foundations, others also see in this system the possibility of foreign governments utilising the donor agencies for political purposes. A study of Rockefeller, Carnegie and Ford foundations shows that these agencies concentrate their investment in the "areas with the greatest payoff" such as training of teachers, institution-building and sectors like agriculture that are crucial to American foreign policy. Besides, the foundations function where the government is not always effective because of ideological and political reasons (Arnove 1981: 148-149). The author quotes another recent study that substantiates his contention that the foundations are able to function as intermediaries of the government because of "an institutional image of professionalism and political independence."

> From the US government viewpoint, the Foundation has sometimes filled a gap between what the State Department would like to do and what Congress would have it do. The Ford Foundation, for example, continued to function as a major technical assistance agency in Burma and Egypt, after diplomatic relations with these countries were either strained or severed. Following the 1977 Egyptian-Israeli war, the Ford Foundation sponsored an exchange programme for Egyptian scholars to come to US universities, which according to Ashley, helped "provide an additional window to the West for an Egypt subject to greatly expanded Soviet cultural influences" (ibid: 149).

In other words, these activists are aware that apart from historical factors also the socio-political situation of a given

society determines the choice of subjects and the methodology of research. By not being aware of these dynamics, the scholar who remains consciously neutral, may play into the hands of the vested interests who either attempt to maintain the *status quo* or control subordinate societies to the benefit of the strong. The activists are of the opinion that research methodology should be specific to each context and should evolve from the need of a given social group.

Power and control

The second consideration that causes uneasiness among scholars and activists follows from the above situation. It concerns the whole question of power. Financially, those who fund research often control policies of institutions and even of countries. Even when financial power is not involved, one should bear in mind that knowledge itself is power. In the present professional methodology, most decisions are top-down. The researcher or his institution decides upon the focus, methodology and outcome of the study. The people who are studied are only used as objects who are there for the convenience of the researcher (Brenner and Marsh 1978).

Many scholars object to this top-down approach also on ethical grounds. The scholar has complete control over research from its inception till its outcome which is either a scholarly book or paper or data required by policy makers or industrialists for action. There is very little involvement of the persons affected.

> And the researcher is neither accountable to them nor responsible for the knowledge thus generated. A researcher can do that in the natural sciences without any ethical considerations because the subject-matter is natural phenomena. Can we follow the same argument for inquiry in social phenomena? (Tandon 1981: 20).

In other words, in the present top-down approach to research and, for that matter, to policy making, research methodology as well as financial, human and other resources

are used as sources of power and control. In traditional research these resources are almost invariably external to the society studied. Similarly, top-down social action projects that follow from this research, rely heavily on external capital, know-how and expertise. In the case of the Green Revolution, for example, massive external inputs in the form of high yielding seeds, fertilisers, implements like tractors and credit were critical resources and little effort was made to supplement them with internal inputs, leave alone build upon what was locally available (Andrew and Stiefel 1980: 50). In fact, some studies indicate that this type of research and consequent action such as the Green Revolution have resulted in 30 multinationals gaining control over the seed production of hybrids and the marketing of fertilisers and pesticides. Thus, without the scientists being aware of it, they have been instrumental in giving the multinational corporations the tools they needed to control agricultural policies and food production not for the interest of the people of the Third World but for their own profit (Mooney 1979).

The scholars and activists who disapprove of this approach would think that the critical resources in any research and action should be the people affected and not those who think that they alone know what the ignorant poor should be doing. These scholars begin with the assumption that

> the rural poor are 'voiceless' not because they have nothing to say but because nodody cares to listen to them. More fundamentally, they constitute the silent majority because they have no 'say' in the decision-making structures of society. In this perspective, it is legitimate to say that development begins with listening to the people. To accept this in actual practice is not easy, even for voluntary agencies in development (Volken 1979: 21).

This would involve changing the power distribution system, the type of resources and technology used for research and the role of the people from objects of study by the researcher to persons who study themselves.

Lack of applicability

Finally, the third consideration that makes many activists and scholars move away from classical research is its lack of applicability. They feel that the present research methodology has neglected social change and has even punished scholars who have tried to combine research with action for change. The mainstream researchers would think that the approach that combines action for social change with research is unscientific and that real professional work should be value-free. Such an approach has disillusioned many. As one of them puts it.

> Technocratic approaches to improve productivity in our villages cannot put the tools of improved productivity into the hands of our poor, rural majority. Thus, increasingly in our search for a key to rural development, we leave aside the conventional economists and technocrats and we turn to the sociologists. Then we encounter a paradox: the professional sociologist is very good at describing a social structure, at measuring attitudes to change, at diagnosing male-female roles and so on . . . But all these sociological exercises do not seem to be of much help, when it comes to putting some equality into the power structure, or modernsing attitude to change, or freeing women from the bondage of traditional ideas about men's and women's roles (Kurien 1980).

Conclusion

These scholars and activists feel that alternatives should be found to the present type of research. They feel that those interested in social change should begin with their own research process in a given social setting. This process should be clear on the whole question of the distribution of power and the importance to be given to the local people, particularly the rural poor as the critical resource. In other words, they do not accept the myth of value free research or the neutrality of the scholar. They do not have clear-out answers for every aspect concerning the methodology of research or

the distribution of power. But they are clear that the methodology and techniques are to be selected to suit the needs of the people and not those of the researcher.

Also the end product would not be a professional paper or material for the policy makers (though these are not excluded) but social change among the majority that has been kept out of all power structures. In other words, these scholars and activists are convinced that social research cannot be neutral in the face of inequality, oppression and the unjust distribution of power. They would think that research should become an instrument of change of the social structures that marginalise the majority to the benefit of a small minority. Research would thus become a process of transformation and liberation.

Such change may be only at the field level or a combination of grassroots mobilisation with change at the policy level. The methodology itself would be conditioned by these objectives. But the scope of research is not merely acquisition of knowledge but primarily social change.

3

Participatory Research as a Possible Alternative

If research is to go beyond the purely academic domain and is to become a tool for social change, it has to search for alternative approaches and methodologies. Participatory research is presented as one such alternative, though very few think of it as the only possible solution to the present concentration of power in the hands of a few. This approach begins with the assumption that the actors in the social setting should cease to be objects of study as they are now, but should become the owners of the knowledge they generate. In this approach, research is viewed no more as a study of a people but a process which the people go through and as a step in awareness building about the situation of the oppressed. It is also a discovery of the potentialities of the silent majority that has so far been neglected by the decision makers except as receivers of knowledge and developmental inputs.

In other words, participatory research would move away from the temptation of giving theoretical knowledge more importance than it deserves, though it would not in any way contend that theory has no place in action. With Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1976: 26-27) those interested in a participatory approach would contend that though only a small minority "engages in theorising, in the business of ideas . . . everyone in society participates in its 'knowledge' in one way or another." One should acknowledge the fact that everyone "lives in a world of some sort" and should be wary

of exaggerating the importance of theory which "is a natural failing of theorisers."

> The theoretical formulations of reality, whether they be scientific or philosophical or even mythological, do not exhaust what is "real" for the members of a society . . . In other words, common sense "knowledge" rather than "ideas" must be the central focus for the sociology of knowledge (ibid: 27).

This is only one aspect of participatory research, i.e, getting over the weakness of traditional research that has given too much importance to theoretical knowledge at the cost of the reality of those affected by day to day events. This step is important because in the participatory approach research is viewed as a process through which those who have been deprived of a voice in the decision making process acquire a place and become sharers in power. There is, however, a danger of the scholar remaining at this negative aspect of getting away from the ethno-centric approach of traditional research and not defining for himself the main features of participation, if it has to become a process of empowering the powerless.

Main features

Claude Levi-Strauss (1966: 124-125), himself a representative of anthropologists for whom desire for information on cultures is sufficient justification for research, gives the first feature of a new approach. He would think that

> Anthropology is the outcome of a historical process which has made the larger part of mankind subservient to the other, and during which millions of innocent human beings have had their institutions and beliefs destroyed, whilst they themselves were ruthlessly killed, thrown into bondage, and contaminated by diseases they were unable to resist.

As a solution, he calls for a renewed understanding of anthroplogy as a science of culture. In this definition, the role of science would not be any more only to gather information about the people but

> the first concern of people made aware of their independent existence and originality must be to claim the right to observe their culture themselves from the inside (ibid: 127).

This would mean that the researcher does not try any more to use the people as objects of study and understand their culture himself. He would be a partner in the joint search for knowledge with the people to whom research would become a tool of awareness building of their potentialities and the value of their culture which has been considered primitive or even savage, by the ethno-centric scholar.

Margaret Mead (1969) another anthropologist, puts the same thought in other words by speaking of the need to turn social sciences into an "ethical research work" if it has to become a tool of change for the informant and not merely a source of information for the scientist.

> Anthropological research does not have subjects. We work with informants in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect . . . It stresses not only the importance of the relationship between a research worker and those among whom he seeks new knowledge, but also the possibility of substituting voluntary participation for "informed consent" as a pre-condition of ethical research work (ibid: 361).

What these anthropologists who are themselves in the business of collecting knowledge stress, is that getting information cannot be an end in itself. The people cannot be studied but have to be helped to study themselves. For centuries the oppressed have been forced to remain subordinate and have been reduced to what Paulo Freire (1972: 36) calls a culture of silence. To get out of this culture, it is important for the oppressed to take the decision-making power into their own hands. Understanding their situation has to be a part of this process of self-understanding, becoming aware of their potential for change and beginning to act. As Julius K. Nyerere (1973: 60) would put it:

> People cannot be developed; they can only develop themselves. For while it is possible for an outsider to build a man's house, an outsider cannot give the man pride and self-confidence in himself as a human being. Those things a man has to create in himself by his own actions. He develops himself by what he does; he develop him self by making his own decisions,by increasing his understanding of what he is doing, and why; by increasing his own knowledge and ability, and by his own full participation as an equal in the life of the community he lives in.

This approach involves a new attitude on the part of the researcher. He cannot be any more a scholar who has the monopoly of knowledge but a partner in the search for the reality which the people live. It would mean that with Bonnie J. Cain (1978: 22) the researcher asks himself whether the criterion in research is "the absolute rightness of objective truth as defined by Western man or can there be sympathy to the ghosts of other peoples?" It would involve accepting the fact that the researcher's view of the world "impinges on the researcher's ability to see, hear, and value what a people is saying, possibly producing a deafness which precludes participation." It would involve that the scholar has faith in the people and their ability to define knowledge, fact or truth and the researcher himself becomes a partner in this process of joint search for the reality.

Budd Hall (1975: 24-32) mentions the following points as the main features of participatory research:

(1) Research method has ideological implications.

(2) Research has to be a process whose primary purpose is some direct benefit to a community, i.e., it has to be instrumental in social change. An academic paper is only a secondary product and not essential to the process.

(3) This process, to be effective, has to involve the whole community at every stage of research, from the formulation of the problem and discussion on the search for a solution, to the interpretation of the data. Involvement of all the groups is essential if we accept social change as the goal of research.

(4) The research process thus becomes a part of an educational experience of the people and increases awareness and commitment within the community. Obviously, it is a dialectical process spread over a long time and not a one-time static study which may be more efficient but not as effective as the process the people go through.

(5) The outcome of this process is liberation of the creative potential that is present in every community but is often suppressed and reduced to silence by the dominant sectors. This liberation is also part of a process of mobilisation of human resources for the solution of social problems.

In the whole process, it is important to keep the concept of ownership of knowledge in the forefront, for knowledge is power. Hence it is important for the people affected by this process to own all knowledge not only the question defined, but also the definition of what methods are used, who records the findings and why they are recorded. In other words, the fundamental question is: "who has the basic right to define reality and who owns knowledge?" Cain (1978: 24) would answer the question by saying:

> I find it more useful to look at participatory research as a process towards gathering new knowledge with the people capable of defining that knowledge. The key word in this statement is "defining', and the key consideration is who gets the power of defining.

Co-optation

Clarity on the concept of ownership is of crucial importance to avoid the danger of co-optation by vested interests. One should not forget that the concept of participation originated in the rich countries and international agencies such as the World Bank. Often it may be a mode of manipulating the people and of getting them involved in projects that are meant to safeguard the interests of the dominant sections. In such a situation, participation may be a mode of maintaining social equilibrium to the advantage of the exploiters. What is called social forestry may be one such

example of motivating the villagers to plant trees that are useful to the industries and have little use for the village economy. In these cases, participation of the people is not much different from the bullock's participation in ploughing, except that the people are made to believe that they are the real doers, Such an approach may not differ much from social engineering (Saint 1980: 4-5).

Even when the concept of participation does not necessarily originate from the rich countries but has emerged from the grassroots level or from professionals committed to the people, the dominant sections have a mode of co-opting these concepts. Ross Kidd and Krishna Kumar (1981) describe how Paulo Freire's thought has been co-opted by the traditional policy makers or vested interests to present their goods in a more attractive package without changing their substance. Freire inspired many groups in their work of liberation.

> He also attracted the attention of those agencies that were developing an educational methodology for the incorporation of the small peasant into the consumer economy under the auspices of the integrated Development Strategy. These agencies found in Freire's terminology a progressive gloss which could make their approach marketable in the Third World. By coopting Freire's terminology and concepts, they could hope to influence the direction of political change in the Third World (ibid: 27-28).

This fact should be borne in mind primarily by the scholar who facilitates research by the people. Though knowledge belongs to the people, the professional inputs of the external researcher are required as aids in this process. His/her work is to facilitate the empowerment of the marginalised sections. While accomplishing this task, the researcher has to counteract the efforts at co-opting by encouraging new trends and supporting genuine action by the people.

Some case studies

Two case studies would perhaps give some indication of

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the process that becomes effective with the people. We have to speak of 'indications' because in a process of this type, exact definitions and clarity of every step in the methodology to be followed is not possible. Only a few steps can be mentioned.

The first case concerns a Tanzanian experience in an *Ujaama* village near Morogoro, and is an example of 'outsiders' becoming aware of the failure of their programme and experimenting with a participative approach. The Community Development Trust Fund (CDTF) viewed the problem in its area as one of developing grain storage. After doing some simple experiments with local methods of storage, the CDTF developed and recommended some models of grain silos. However, success in its acceptance was limited and CDTF felt the need of a new approach, for it assumed that the farmers were averse to the silos they had developed since they came from outside. To break down the resistance of the farmers, CDTF began with the assumption that the farmers already had a grain storage science and that they should build on this knowledge rather than replace it. In the process of discussion about the local systems the CDTF 'outsiders' could share with the people information about experiences in other parts of Tanzania. This combined effort, it was presumed, would lead to a new model of storage silos which would be the result of a joint effort of the local people and the CDTF. A joint people CDTF committee was accordingly formed to begin the technical experiment. Discussion began on modalities of developing a new silo.

However, the result of the discussion turned out to be different from what CDTF had intended it to be. The first discovery of the joint committee was that not all had a grain storage problem. The rich farmers had an excess of grain to store while the poorer ones often had to work as labourers in order to earn their daily bread. This meant that the group had to go beyond the silo experimentation and had to discuss other social problems. In the grain storage system itself, different models had to be developed for each class and no external model could be transferred there. After more

than six weeks of experimentation, visits to other villages and discussion with CDTF, the people were able to develop a model of their own. What emerged out of this discussion was not merely a new silo but a new awareness in the people of the system of inequalities and of their capability to change their system. One sign of this change was that a few months later these illiterate farmers were able to give a seminar to the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Morogoro. The farmers had become aware that they had created knowledge and become experts in low cost grain storage without any university degree to support them (Hall 1978: 11-12).

We could give other examples from the pastoralist group approach in the *Jipemoyo* Project in the Bagamoyo district of Tanzania (Mustafa 1981). But of greater relevance to us may be the example of *Bhoomi Sena* from the Thane district of Maharashtra. This is a case of the people getting disillusioned with external leaders, beginning a process of their own, involving outsiders and through a trial and error method identifying their own role and that of outsiders. This process took place not in an academic context but in a struggle for liberation from the clutches of *sowcars* and moneylenders (Rahman 1981).

Disillusioned with the 'land grab movement' of the left parties which encouraged the tribals to grab land and to go to jail but refused to go beyond what the *adivasis* viewed only as symbolic gestures, the *adivasi* leaders in jail realised that their rights could be achieved only by a sustained struggle of their own. Once out of Jail, Kaluram Dhodade, an *adivasi* himself, began discussions with the villagers about land alienation. This discussion led to a slow collective awareness of the fact that most of their land had been illegally taken over by the *sowcars*. This discussion also led to a new sense of oneness among the tribals and confidence in their young leaders who had begun this process. A decision was taken to forcibly seize the crops on lands that belonged to the people but were illegally occupied by the moneylenders. When the *sowcars* called the police, the people charged them with illegal activities because the moneylenders, not the tribals, were in illegal

occupation of their land. This compelled the sub-divisional officer to come to the village and settle land cases; all except one of them were decided in favour of the tribals.

However, the *Bhoomi Sena*, which was thus born, did not have a strategy beyond crop seizure. Slowly the people began to lose their lands once again to moneylenders. As a solution, Kaluram consulted an outside agency that worked out a technocratic solution to land development. The people were not prepared either for this project which turned out to be paternalistic or to the bank loans that they decided upon at a later stage. Their failure was a humiliation to the villagers who had started speaking about their power and self-reliance.

> Shocked at this humiliation, the *adivasis* of 30 villages now held their own meeting in which Kaluram admitted his mistake in submitting to outsiders, and the people voted for ending this programme (ibid: 5)

Now a new phase began. The vanguard group realised the need of decentralisation and of encouraging local action in the villages. The group only acted as facilitators and co-ordinators, not as the main decision makers, The local action took the form of crop seizure, resisting atrocities by the moneylenders and government officials, resisting distribution of land by the government to influential persons rather than to the tribals (the real owners) etc. All these were ongoing struggles for which the people suffered, but also built up their self-confidenee and came to a better understanding of their power and self-reliance. It was obviously a political struggle to achieve social liberation. There was collective spontaneity together with inputs from the vanguard group of *adivasis* and from outsiders. The tribals slowly realised that a countervailing power was essential against the power of the oppressors.

The tribals also realised that while building a countervailing power, they had to beware of internal authoritarianism. Self-reliance had to be the most important value they cherished. They also recognised the role outsiders could play in their struggle. But it was not to be the most decisive role. In many cases it was required as a means to acquire sustaining power

during their struggle. But this power had to be acquired by the *adivasis* themselves by acquiring new knowledge, by creating new organisations or by building on what they had. They were also conscious of their deficiencies and required outside help in some areas. But the outsiders were to be only a support in their struggle.

> *Bhoomi Sena seeke* the assistance of outsiders who can help in the acceleration of their learning. At the same time they are aware from bitter experience that blind submission to external knowledge dehumanises them and instead of raising their capability, makes them dependent. Learning is a creative process that cannot be accomplished by a mechanical transfer of external knowledge. The latter has to be adopted by critical reflection and creative application in order to be internalised (ibid: 15-16).

What a participatory approach means in this situation is not merely that there has to be redistribution of wealth but also of the means of thinking and of the decision making process. In other words, there has to be a redistribution of power. Self-reliance is not merely material but also intellectual. External resources are required in this self-reliance, or to be more exact, in the process of becoming self-reliant. The role of outsiders is to assist local talent, not to replace it. This is a delicate task for used as we professionals are to defining what is knowledge, we have to begin the process of trusting the 'ignorant masses' to define it.

This is a dynamic process and, needless to say, has its political implications since it comes face to face with the power structures that oppress the majority to the benefit of the minority. One does not assert by saying this, that what is called value-free research is not political. As mentioned above, vested interests can easily use this research for their own ends. Besides, every methodology was born at a definite historical moment within a definite set of socio-economic and political circumstances. Calling such a methodology value-free is already taking a political stance of ethno-centrism that absolutises to the whole world, particularly to the dependent sections, methodologies developed according to the needs of a dominant minority.

However, participatory research is much more directly political in the sense that the external researcher has to make his/her political stance clear, unlike the traditional researcher whose political stance is unconscious. One involved in participatory research would have to make an option in favour of social change geared to the needs of the oppressed sections of society.

Knowledge of systems

Knowledge is power and one important way of keeping people in a subordinate position. Hence if the participatory process is to lead to genuine empowerment, then it has to bring knowledge of the systems that oppress, close to the people. It may be knowledge of the health system, of technolgy, of house construction or management techniques. They must be turned into supportive structures of the people instead of systems whose knowledge is today kept away from the people and used to subjugate them.

On the other hand, one cannot assume that only knowledge of a system makes it an effective tool for the empowerment of the people. In other words, transfer of knowledge is to be used as an entry point for a process of mobilisation. A combination of political, economic and other factors is needed for this mobilisation to be effective. A study of the role the legal system can play in a people's struggle for liberation from oppression can clarify this point.

The role of law

The legal system, if properly utilised, can work as an outsider supporting the people in their struggle for their rights. But whether law works as support or obstruction depends not on the legal provisions themselves but on the awareness of these provisions, the extent of people's self-reliance and the support they can get from committed lawyers.

Bhoomi Sena which we have mentioned above is a case in point. Though rural indebtedness had been abolished and the lands belonged legally to the tribals, in practice they had neither the knowledge nor the strength required to lay claim

to these lands. The leftist parties which encouraged the land grab movement were not prepared to go beyond what the tribals considered symbolic gestures and make them aware of their rights. However, the initial hope of the movement and the later disillusionment together with the determination of a few vanguard leaders, helped the tribals become aware of their rights as well as of their strength.

At this stage the knowledge of law came to their rescue and helped them acquire what was theirs by right while millions of other tribals were still languishing in bondage in spite of laws abolishing this practice. Similar studies about other laws have shown that legal enactments in themselves cannot bring about social change. In fact, if these laws go against the vested interests, the dominant sections ensure that the affected sections are kept away from the knowledge of these laws and that, if they are aware, they are unable to use them for their liberation.

Such, for example, is the case of the Debt Relief Act 1976 in Karnataka. In very few cases did the debtors have the courage to tell the creditors that they would not return the loans and in fewer cases still (less than 5 per cent) did the creditors go along with the law. In most cases, they did not have any sustaining power to stand up to the creditors and demand their rights (Khan 1981: 41).

The atrocities on the Scheduled Castes is another example of the landlords reacting to the landless agricultural labourers who demand minimum wages which are their due according to the law. They have been able to attain their goal only when they have organised themselves, acquired sustaining power and demanded their rights. In such cases, law has aided them to enforce their rights. In other cases, they have been suppressed as in the case of the Pipra massacre where the feudal lords were able to destroy a village though a Central Reserve Police Force battalion was camping only about 100 metres away from the village (Das 1979: 40-42).

Other studies show that law may not promote social change but can act as a deterrent. Such for example, is the case of the Race Relations Act in the United Kingdom. Racial feelings themselves have grown more intense in that

country during the last few years but the law has worked as a deterrent against open discrimination (Lester and Bindman 1972).

The case of the law on the abolition of 'untouchability' in India too is similar. In cases where the 'untouchables' do not have much bargaining power, the dominant castes ignore this law or find loopholes. A study of some villages in Uttar Pradesh showed that ordinarily the landlords did not allow the 'untouchables' to draw water from the village well. However, when a government official visited the village the 'untouchables' were asked to draw water from the common well in steel vessels, since steel is considered non-polluting. Hence the law was respected only in the presence of government officials. For the rest of their lives, the landlords ensured that the landless labourers remained uneducated, unorganised and indebted to them. This gave them the certainty of continued control over them (Jetley 1977: 54-56).

Another example is the distinction commonly made between what is called public and private observance of caste. Because of legal provisions, many discriminatory practices that were common have slowly disappeared in the public domain, at least in the urban areas. Thus mixing of castes in offices, buses and other public places is an accepted practice. But this does not extend to the private domain. The more private the area, the greater the separation. Thus there is some inter-dining, but discrimination is common. Separation is most visible in marriage and family life (Desai 1976). Thus, while acting as a deterrent against public discrimination, law has not been able to do much in the private domain except in areas where the Scheduled Castes are well organised and are able to demand their rights. In these cases, the legal provisions work as their support, In other words,

> the function of law is not so much to guide society. as to comfort it. Belief in fundamental principles of law does not necessarily lead to an orderly society. Such a belief is as often at the back of revolt or disorder. Respect for fundamental principles of law performs the same function in stiffening the morale of those who are in revolt against

established institutions as it does in holding in line those who defend these institutions (Arnold 1972: 47).

One can notice this in the Hindu marriage, inheritance and other laws. Child marriage persists in spite of the law, but where education and economic change has come about, there is also a change in the age of marriage. Monogamy is practised according to the law since the socio-economic conditions were ripe for this change, while the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 is observed more in its breach than observance (Chatterjee, Singh and Yadav 1971).

The implication for participatory research is that law can become part of the common search of the people for their rights. Legal education can help people become aware of their exploitative situation and later can encourage them in their struggle. That legal decisions in themselves cannot change the situation is seen from the fact that despite the Supreme Court orders, thousands of undertrials are still languishing in the badly kept jails of the country and the situation of the chalk mine workers in Mandsaur has remained unchanged. But these decisions have made at least a few sections of society aware of the situation and aided activists who want to work for a change of the system.

Conclusion

We have tried to study a process of participation which has been presented as one possible alternative by those who are disillusioned with traditional research since it has not led to any social change. This alternative is propagated also by those who do not accept the claims of value-free and objective nature of academic research.

Participatory research can be an alternative but under no circumstances can it be called the sole alternative. One of the reasons is that it is still in its infancy in the academic circles, though as the case studies have shown, many activist groups have been practising it without knowing the terminology.

In order to find alternatives to the present system, one needs to develop attitudes of trust in the people who have

been left out of all decision making. The methodology itself will have to be dynamic and developed in consultation with the people according to their needs, resources and capacities. Unlike the traditional system that attaches great importance to techniques and methods, a participatory approach begins with the people.

On the other hand, one cannot claim that every aspect of traditional research has to be rejected as being anti-people. Just as the legal. medical and other dominant systems have been used to strengthen the exploited sections, also traditional methodologies, if properly combined with a participatory process, can be turned into a supportive tool for the people. In other words, one cannot think of a total dichotomy bet ween traditional and participatory methods. A combination of the two is possible. We shall now go on to study one such experiment and discuss the role of various methodologies in supporting people's struggles.

4

Combining Traditional and Participatory Methodologies: The Forest Studies

The significance of research diminishes to the extent it remains the exclusive domain of 'experts' or 'professionals'. The apparently invincible barrier of mystification that is built around research methodologies ensures that it remains within this exclusive domain of professionals making it inaccessible to the common persons who should be the real owners of this knowledge since it comes from them. Conventional methods have thus become instrumental in depriving the 'lay-person' of control over knowledge and in transfering all power to the outsider research professionals. Participatory research therefore has to utilise an alternative methodology that seeks to retain the ownership of knowledge in the possession of the people by involving them in research as part of their life. In following simultaneously an action-reflection-action pattern it becomes part of an awareness building process.

To understand this process of transfer of power to the people we shall now make a critical analysis of PR methodology as it was employed in three research projects on 'Forests, Environment and Forest dweller Economy' taken up in Orissa, Chattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh. After looking at the different objectives aimed at through this methodology in these research projects, we shall try to analyse, on the basis of

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these studies, the different factors determining the effectiveness and objectivity of this method.

Rationale for combining methodologies

The origin of the studies had clear implications for the research design. They were a follow up of a workshop on a New Forest Policy held at the Indian Social Institute in April 1982. During discussions it was realised that apart from the socio-economic structures that ensure the control of a small minority over the economy, lack of adequate data on the people also contributes to the present forest policy that goes against the people. It is based almost exclusively on data concerning industrial raw material, techniques of production and potential for revenue generation. There is near total lack of data on the role forests play in the economic, social and cultural life of the forest dwellers, particularly tribals. The participants at the workshop, therefore, gave a mandate to the organisers to undertake serious research in all the states of the Indian Union in order to mobilise the forest dwellers around the forest issue and to make the policy makers aware of the elements of a new forest policy (Fernandes and Kulkarni 1983). Not all these studies have been completed. Here we are analysing two studies done by the Indian Social Institute in Orissa and Chattisgarh (Madhya Pradesh) and one by PRIA in Himachal Pradesh.

The researchers were assigned the double role of facilitating grass roots level mobilisation and of supporting micro-level action by producing a professionally acceptable report understood by the macro-level decision makers. Hence it had two distinct target groups with absolutely different perspectives. At the micro-level the people's, viz. the forest dwellers', critical awareness had to be raised and mobilised to demand changes in the 1952 forest policy whose implementation gives very low priority to the needs of the tribals and other forest dwellers. At the macro-level it sought to pressurise the government to modify the Draft Forest Bill 1980 and The National Forest Policy 1952 by bringing to their notice the socio-economic conditions and needs of the forest dwellers

which ought to get priority in the formulation of a new forest policy. To facilitate mobilisation in the field, we decided to do the study in cooperation with voluntary organisations (action groups) already active among the tribals and other forest dwellers.

Research acquires credibility only when it is contextualised within the situation of the 'target group' (participants). Its credibility is to a great extent determined by the needs and viewpoint of the participants. Credibility is also a function of the ideological orientation of the external researchers. The closer their orientation, aims and objectives to those of the people, the greater their credibility, (Anon 1982: 2-3). The perspective of conventional research (CR) and that of the decision-makers who depend exclusively on it, usually differs considerably from that of the people. For the conventional researcher, the research project has credibility only to the extent it is able to provide valid and reliable data. For the people on the contrary the yardstick of objectivity and credibility is not primarily in systematic standardisation but in a methodology which provides them with an opportunity of passing 'through a process of social verification.' (Rahman 1984: 4). Hence for the people objectivity of knowledge is not necessarily derived from the scrupulous application of certain rules and regulations of standardised methodologies but through a collective or communitarian process, wherein they grow as a group. In that sense the people and the external facilitators are co-researchers.

In the study on 'Forests, Environment and forest dweller economy' both the specific needs of the people and those of the decision makers at the macro-level had to be taken into account and the methodology adapted to these objectives. This was done because research methodology is determined not merely by historical background as we have seen earlier, but also by the socio-political situation of the society in which the study is conducted (Byceson, Manicom and Kassam 1982: 67-68) and by the objectives of the researcher. In our case, the social situation was one of the impoverishment of the tribals as a result of deforestation by the commercial-industrial interests. Consequently, the methodology had to be such

that it would give a boost to the self-image of the forest dwellers who are constantly marginalised as a result of the present forest policy.

Moreover, methodology is also conditioned by the objectives (Freire 1982: 31-32). In our case, we had the twin objectives of mobilisation in the field and pressure building on the policy makers. Consequently, we had to use both the professional language understood by the macro-level decision-makers and popular language for the field. It meant that both the methodologies viz. conventional and participatory had to be made use of, the former for quantitative data collection and the latter for initiating the mobilisation process at the grassroots level. Consequently the method adopted was what one might call syncretic. An effort was made to integrate the traditional and participatory methods into one whole. But for reasons we shall explain later, we met with only partial success. For data collection (particularly quantitative) we used techniques of conventional research (CR) and the mobilisation of the people relied heavily on participatory and non-formal educational methods. Hence the two approaches were adjacent as it were and not combined into one (Ferandes, Menon and Viegas 1984: 46-62).

Briefly, the question on methodology we had to face was whether an integration of these two approaches is possible in such a way that the two can merge into one and yet retain the benefits of both. Is CR to be used only as a first step to a participatory process or can individual data collection itself be used as a tool for mobilisation without in the process losing the reliability of the data? Many participatory researchers think that CR can provide us with valid and reliable quantitative data but bring about little or no mobilisation (Mbilinyi and Vuorela 1982: 304). Conventional researchers, on the contrary, feel that while PR can bring about extensive mobilisation, precisely for this reason it can reduce the validity and objectivity of the data collected (Fernandes and Tandon 1981: 5).

An attempt at integration

It was therefore decided to experiment with a variety of

approaches to the integration of methodologies. This open-ended approach had to be adopted because of the constraints under which the integration was attempted. First of all, we had to work under the constraint of external deadlines. Our study proper began only in early 1983 and a new forest policy was expected to be presented at the monsoon or winter session of parliament, 1984. Since one of our objectives was to feed data concerning the forest dwellers to the policy makers, it was necessary to get the final report ready long before the parliament session. Definite deadlines had, therefore, to be fixed for the collection of individual as well as group data. A genuine participatory process, particularly when it was based on individual data collection, would have required a much longer time and more freedom than these deadlines allowed. We decided to live with this constraint and use conventional methodology for individual data collection and then use the data thus collected as a tool for mobilisation. Thus methodologies were not integrated but chronologically they followed one another.

Another major constraint was the length of our contact with the groups in the study area. We knew some groups in Orissa for a fairly long time but others joined us just before the study. We were in correspondence with several groups of Chattisgarh for two years but met most of them just before the study began. Himachal Pradesh has very few action groups hence traditional adult education groups had to be used in a participatory study, and PRIA contacted them only a short time before the study.

This explains why as many as four groups in Orissa were able to use this study as a tool for mobilisation at least to some extent and two others used some of its elements, Success was much more limited in Chattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh where contact with the groups was limited. In other words, in order to function as facilitators of a participatory process, external researchers need to establish a rapport with the local activists and if possible, also with the people. This requires a fairly long contact with them. If the external facilitator contacts the local groups just before the study, the

latter tend to look at the former only as an accademic professional who perhaps uses them to make the study easier and cheaper. Much time was lost in clarifying these issues in the course of the study. Consequently mobilisation suffered.

Given these constraints, in Orissa, and Chattisgarh we decided to face these methodological issues by the introduction of four stages of data collection cum mobilisation. In the first stage data were collected from individual interviews. The second stage was devoted to mobilisation cum data collection with the aid of group discussions. The third stage involved data collection from government officials while the fourth consisted of case studies, folklore etc. from the forest dwellers. Since integration of methodologies did not go according to our plan, in practice the first and third stages were primarily devoted to data collection though mobilisation as one of the objectives of this method was always in our mind. The second and fourth stages turned out to be primarily for mobilisation of the people, although the collection of data too was thought of as a by-product. In other words, preoccupation during the first stage was primarily with quantitative data collection and very little was achieved in the form of mobilisation. Similarly, there were many limitations on data collection during group discussions, but a great deal of mobilisation was achieved. The same impact was observed in the fourth stage when in groups the forest dwellers discussed their stories, customs, songs etc. built around the forest motif.

However in Orissa we noticed a major change towards the end of our study. Mobilisation was quite effective in a few groups during the fourth stage, and our preliminary report and official data were used in group discussions. Consequently, some social activists and even a few local leaders began to see the relavance of quantitative data not merely for policy changes but also as a basis for mobilisation. One should add that these were a minority. The majority kept the dichotomy between the two methodologies.

Introducing new elements

The construction of the semi-structured questionnaire was

an attempt at bridging the gap between the two methodologies. To obtain certain quantitative data some questions for individual interviews had to be closed-ended thus ensuring the accuracy and validity of the answers. At the same time, however, to make room for qualitative data and to enable greater participation of the people through discussion etc., a few guidelines were provided for the interview and many open ended questions used. Questions concerning the amount of firewood sold can be mentioned among the closed-ended questions. Those concerning their views on the causes of deforestation were meant not merely for collecting qualitative data but primarily to be a starting point for discussion and reflection at the individual level, on the situation of the forests and forest dwellers.

We felt that the best tool for the integration of the methods was the involvement of the people at every level of the study beginning with the decision to undertake the study and the preparation of the questionnaire. In addition to creating interest and greater awareness in them regarding the forest issue, such participation could also give them control over the direction of the study. This, to our mind, is of crucial importance in any participatory research project. In order to achieve this, the study was divided into different phases.

1. Discussion on the decision regarding the study
2. Selection of topics/areas of study
3. Sampling for the study
4. Design of the study
5. Development of the questionnaire
6. Selection of investigators
7. Data collection
8. Data processing and analysis
9. Drafting of the Report
10. Dissemination of the findings.

Ownership of knowledge

With the exception of data processing and the drafting of the report, people's involvement was asked for in all other phases. This should have enabled the people to maintain

control over the entire study. A deliberate attempt at achieving even greater participation and control by the people at each of these levels is perhaps one of the best ways of bringing the two strategies together. Integration can be achieved only at some specific stages. On account of the technical nature of some of its elements like data processing and analysis, people's participation might be minimum in these aspects. However, we decided that these considerations should not be a reason for leaving the people on the periphery. So we attempted to involve them to the extent possible, de-mistify the research process and reduce the control of experts over the production of knowledge. Such participation in the technical aspects of research is a challenge to anyone who takes the question of ownership of knowledge seriously.

It was not too difficult to get the people involved in decision making concerning the study itself, since they felt the problem of forests very deeply. But it was not easy to involve them in the technical aspects concerning questionnaire formulation. We met together in January 1983 and identified the main areas to be studied. We agreed that the social activists would go back to their area of operation, discuss all these issues with the people and would come back two months later with a preliminary questionnaire. All these questionnaires would be put together to evolve an interview schedule.

When we met two months later, only two out of nine groups involved had come with a well formulated questionnaire. Four other groups only had some suggestions to make to improve the schedule. Though initially we thought that only two groups had attempted people's participation i.e. had tried to transfer control over the formulation of the questionnaire to the people, later we realised those who really attempted such a transfer were those who did not have a questionnaire ready, but only had suggestions for the improvement of the schedule. They had discussed with the people the problems concerning the various areas of study. But since they did not have a research background, they were unable to formulate a questionnaire. On the other hand,

those who had come prepared with a questionnaire are persons who had some background in conducting surveys. We are not certain that they had discussed the issues with the people. We are left with the impression that they formulated the questionnaire in their office, not necessarily after discussion with the people. In other words, they participated with us in building the instrument but this did not ensure the control of the people. We transferred control to those who were the intermediaries between us and the people. But control of knowledge remained with the intermediaries and was not transferred to the people. Those who only had suggestions to make for improvement are persons who attempted a genuine transfer of ownership of the production of knowledge to the people. But control of the instrument remained with us (researchers) since these social activists did not have the technical knowledge required to formulate the schedule. In Chattisgarh only two groups had discussed the questionnaire with the people, but had very few suggestions to make.

One possible conclusion that emerges out of these apparent contradictions is that it is possible to involve the people in the formulation of a conventional schedule and turn it into a tool for mobilisation. But this requires a much longer time than we had at our disposal, given the deadlines we were working with. Secondly, the activists and perhaps the people need to be trained in the technical aspects of questionnaire formulation and not merely in identifying the areas of study. It does not have to be a long training programme but a progressive introduction to the techniques as discussion with the people continues. In other words, people's participation is incomplete till they have control over the technology used, not merely on its use (Heredero 1980: 56-57).

If such an attempt is not made to involve the people in the control of the technical aspects of the study, there is the danger of the people leaving everything in the hands of the researchers or of the intermediary group. We realise that what was true about the development of the instrument is equally true about the tabulation and processing of the data and drafting of the report. This is an additional reason for

the researcher to devise way of involving the people in these technical stages. For instance, for the questionnaire construction one could sit along with the people and draw their attention to issues they are not aware of and would like to know more about. These areas would be useful for further discussion and reflection from which a questionnaire would emerge.

Because of time constraints, also for data processing we followed the conventional method of coding and computerisation. Because of this, the data that had been collected from the people remained with us for a long time till the draft report was ready. Stage II i.e. group discussion cum mobilisation continued for some time. The activists say that had data from individual interviews been available earlier, they would have been able to make mobilisation much more effective. They state that availability of data at this stage was important because, given the deadlines, long discussion and an educational process was not possible during the individual interviews. Concentration was on data collection. Hence more time should have been given later for discussion based on these data. As things stand, the data were got in August 1983 and the preliminary report was ready only in March 1984. Thus there was a seven month gap.

We feel that one can get over this constraints if data processing and analysis are done both by the researcher and the people. While the researcher codes and analyses data from the whole sample, in each group a few literates can be trained to process and analyse data from their area sample use the findings for discussion and write a report. For the analysis one perhaps needs to begin with a few hunches on the starting point for discussion and subsequently examine them statistically once the data processing is completed. Thus the people do not have to wait for a long time between data collection and analysis. Moreover, local resource persons are trained in this manner for an ongoing analysis of their situation. In other words, they do not always have to depend on outsiders for data collection and analysis of their situation.

Mobilisation

The purpose of participatory research is mobilisation which can be described as active awareness of a given issue, that motivates the people to take action. Its external manifestation would be increased awareness in the people as a group about the issues at stake e.g. forests, land etc., or creating this conciousness where there had been none; the creation of a reflection-action-reflection cycle in the people; a deep inner commitment on the part of the people as a group to the issue and a serious undertaking of concerted action to change their situation. An important aspect is the 'group effect' i.e. conciousnes raised not merely in a few individuals but involving the entire group of the marginalised. Obviously, one will have to make allowances for exceptions, but all in all it has to be a 'group consciousness', a 'group-commitment' to the issue and a 'group-action'. Mobilisation thus as a process seeks to transform the prevalent values and attitudes to the benefit of the group and to inculcate new values in the group of the marginalised where the existing ones favour the dominant sections.

One of the primary aims of the Orissa forest Study was precisely such mobilisation of the forest dwellers in reference to the forests and the national forest policy, as part of the present pattern of development. It might be claimed that a good amount of mobilisation took place in some groups of Orissa, particularly the four groups that had originally discussed the questionnaire with the people. The factors leading to this process will be discussed later. For the moment suffice it to state that of the three areas where the Forest Study was conducted (Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh) maximum mobilisation took place in some groups of Orissa. This is reflected in the concrete action-oriented programmes that the people in these areas of Orissa have taken, such as bamboo protection and community forestry in Kalahandi, Community plantation programmes in Sambalpur, Dhenkanal and Ganjam etc. Underlying these activities is a deep understanding of the issue and commitment of the people to a change in the

national policy and the realisation that they alone can change their situation.

Due to unavoidable circumstances it has not been possible to gauge the extent of mobilisation in Chattisgarh (Madhya Pradesh) although there are enough indications that it is much less than in Orissa. In Himachal Pradesh some awareness has taken place, where earlier there was none, but mobilisation (leading to action) is yet to come about. Although a greater sensitivity to deforestation is noticeable in the forest dwellers in HP, basically they feel that it is the duty of the Government to put an end to the indiscriminate destruction that is taking place around them. In other words, in HP and to some extent parts of Orissa, the study has been instrumental in increasing the knowledge of the people about the forest but not create a critical awareness.

We attribute this difference both to the approach of the action groups concerned and the length of our contact with them. Communication was easier with those groups in Orissa with whom we had a relatively long contact. As a result, they were able to understand much more than the others, both the objectives of the study and its constraints though they conld not always overcome the latter. Mobilisation also depended on the extent of people's participation each group encouraged in its daily work. The four grops that had discussed the questionnaire with them, are also the ones that achieved more mobilisation through this research than the others did. What this indicates is that participatory research cannot be a substitute for lack of people's participation in their day to day work or of control over the decisions concerning their life. It can reinforce a process that exists already or can facilitate its emergence when it does not exist but the participants are open to change. The latter seems to have been the case with one group in Himachal Pradesh that was a traditional development agency. The study helped it to identify new issues and think of the possibility of mobilisation, though its members could not go far in the course of the study.

People's empowerment

Mobilisation is expected to lead to people's empowerment i. e. an awareness of their organised power which manifests itself in their ability to decide for themselves, particularly in matters of great consequence to them. PR through its inherent knowledge creating capacity, attempts to make the people aware of their own potential and the resources they possess to translate this potential into action. It cannot be denied that the very act of decision-making has a tremendous humanising effect on them as a group, perks up their self-image and gives them a sense of personal worth which the oppressed have been deprived of over centuries (Heredero 1977: 24-25).

There have been visible signs of these in differing degrees in Orissa where this study was conducted. In some areas, the people have been able to discuss and take decisions about taking up certain forest-related issues as a group. In Kalahandi, for instance, they have on their own decided to protect their forests from the contractors, to take up plantations in their village forest lands and have taken the initiative to meet the forest department officials regarding these. Through their own efforts they have also been able to obtain the village land from the revenue inspector for community forestry, and obtain from the forest department the type of samplings they wanted instead of accepting the commercial species which the officials were trying to impose on them.

This should be seen in the context of the perpetual fear and terror of the forest officials, forest contractors and of the revenue officials in which they lived. Forest officials harass the people and insist that they are the real enemies of the forest, when in fact deforestation is caused mostly by industrial clearfelling, timber contractors and smugglers. This deprival of their life system i. e. the forests on which they depended for more than 50% of their food, had forced the forest dwellers to have recourse to destructive dependence by for example, cutting trees for sale as firewood. The people are not reconciled to this destructive dependence but are forced by circumstances to continue this destruction.

New forms of afforestation according to the food, fuel, fertiliser, fodder, small timber needs of the people is their mode of resisting the external elements that have been depriving them of their forests and have been impoverishing them. It is a mode of getting out of the situation that had forced them to cut trees and of putting the blame for deforestation where it belongs i.e. on commercial-industrial interests and the forest department that supports them. These together have forced the people into poverty and into destructive dependence on forests. The community forestry programme is a mode the people have, of re-affirming their traditional constructive dependence on forests which maintained a balance between people's and ecological needs. It is a way of re-affirming their right to a decent living, against contractors and officials who deprive them of their life system. Briefly, it is the first step away from a culture of silence to the re-assertion of their humanity (Freire 1978: 63-64).

In fact, again and again the people mentioned to us their helplessness in the presence of government officials and their desire to free themselves from this passive attitude. In Himachal Pradesh, for instance, the people often mentioned their inability to do anything except abide faithfully by government legislation no matter how impracticable it is to their context and needs. The forest department, for instance, has taken away all the *shamlat* (village forest) land which used to provide the villagers with their timber, fuel and grazing requirements. By way of replacement, the forest department has given them a small plot of fallow land on which not a single tree can grow and is totally insufficient for grazing the village cattle. Although dissatisfied with this arrangement, the people take it passively saying that it is their duty to abide by government legislation.

Self-confidence

This is a natural corollary to empowerment. People's confidence in themselves increases in proportion to their empowerment as it is manifested in their capacity to decide for themselves. As they gain greater confidence, they feel increasingly more prepared to face the landlords and other

exploiters as equals where formerly their relationship was characterised by servile fear; they begin to show initiative in approaching the government and bank officials; they acquire leadership qualities and are able to organise their co-villagers; when the occasion warrants, they draw up memoranda and send them to the authorities concerned. Such manifest signs are visible among people who have undergone the process of genuine participatory research (Rahman 1984: 11).

Looking back on the Forest Study as it was conducted in Orissa, the events mentioned above are an indication of the people beginning to gain in self-confidence and taking decisions for themselves. It is not possible to measure the exact extent of this confidence and compare it with what they already had before the study was conducted. All that we can say is that such growth in self-confidence was not uniform in all the groups. It was greater in four groups, medium in two and almost non-existent in three others. In the four in which the impact was the greatest, there was a combination of factors that made such a growth possible, such as an attempt to involve the people in their decision-making process. The study thus became an opportunity for them to intensify the process by bringing the people together and beginning a reflection on the forest policy, its implications for their life and their response. The training given to the people in one of the groups in Ganjam enabled them to conduct their own surveys and analyse their situation. Thus the study worked as a support to a process that was already existing and helped them to go beyond the micro-level, view their situation within a macro-perspective and initiate micro-action in the form of alternate forms of community forestry that went away from the forest policy which favours industry.

The groups on which the impact was medium, were those that were attempting to go beyond welfare projects and were searching for an issue and a methodology. The study provided them with both and they were able to begin a process of education, reflection and action on the forest question, such as decision on the type of trees to be planted, mobilisation to get revenue land for forestry and seedlings etc, from forest officials who had till then considered the people their enemies.

Another example of the demonopolisation of knowledge would be a group in Kalahandi, that was trained by us in research methodology during this study. The animators thus trained were literate but only a few had completed their high school. They have now gone beyond the forest study to identify some key issues of the area, gather and analyse data and use them as the basis for future reflection and action.

We do not attribute these actions exclusively to the forest study but only say that it has served to stimulate the exploratory instinct of the leaders and has demonstrated to them the need for a firm data base as an essential input for ongoing action-reflection-action process. All that we can say is that the study has facilitated a few steps needed for the process of demonopolisation of knowledge and action. Also our failure with the other groups has to be attributed to a combination of internal dynamics and inadequate external inputs, These are the groups with whom we entered into contact only a few months before the study began and we did not have enough knowledge of their inner dynamics. One of these groups had a somewhat paternalistic attitude towards the people and had a rclief orientation. Consequently, the animators were not prepared for people-oriented inputs. Another group had very dedicated persons but the animators were divided into two groups viz. those who wanted to use development to integrate the tribals into the Hindu mainstream and others who were working for the economic development of the people. Those with a religious motivation of integrating the tribals into the Hindu mainstream were not much interested in the forest issue since the forest is closely linked to tribal economy. Consequently, any importance given to the role of forests in their life ran the risk of taking them closer to tribal than to the mainstream Hindu culture. Those with an economic outlook viewed plantations as one more 'project' and initiated action in terms of community forestry. But the project did not set any people's movement in motion around the forest issue, because it was not viewed as a mode of asserting the people's independence.

Such has been our experience also in Chattisgarh (Madhya Pradesh) and in Himachal Pradesh. Except for two groups in

Chattisgarh, we only had limited contacts with the others before the study began. In some cases the groups viewed it as *our* study. Three groups (two in Chattisgarh and one in Himachal) were able to go deeper into the forest question as a result of the study and felt that the issue could be used as a tool to build up a people's organisation. But at the end of the study, only the animators had become aware of the forest issue and it is hoped that this awareness will filter down to the people.

What this shows is that although participatory research has the capacity to mobilise action, create self-confidence, empower the people, etc., it cannot be viewed in isolation. It is an external input that necessarily interacts with the internal factors of the group. Consequently, the type of inputs have to be adapted to the needs of the people. As will be clarified in later sections, the creative potential of participatory research is enhanced or restricted by such factors as the action group's level of awareness, the extent of mobilisation already taking place in the area, the rural experience of the animators, the length of contact between the people and the external researchers etc. When, as in Ganjam and Kalahandi mobilisation has been extensive and the people have already arrived at a certain level of awareness, participatory research gives them further inputs and supports them in their struggle. In fact, the survey and the group discussions helped the local people to systematise their reflection and action. In those groups that wanted to go towards a more people-oriented action and were searching for an issue and a methodology, the study was instrumental in strengthening this search. The others might have got more knowledge of the forests but not awareness of the issue or of the situation of the people.

Strengthening people's organisation

We have mentioned earlier that one objective of participatory research is to strengthen people's organisation by transferring the ownership of knowledge to them from the hands of the experts. This may even involve initiating a process of slowly but steadily weaning the people away from the

organisation that supported them so that eventually they are able to stand on their own. This does not involve cutting off of all ties with the core organisation that initiated this process, but rather that the people have matured and 'come of age' in the sense that they have no ties of dependence on anyone but are able to manage their own affairs through the power and inner strength emerging from their unity and organisation. The core organisation thus continues some form of external support to the people (Byceson and Mustafa 1982: 105-106).

To what extent has the Forest Study been helpful in strengthening people's organisations? This impact is better gauged by comparing Orissa where the action groups have been working for a long time with the other two areas. We have said that some action followed the study. As far as the people are concerned, it is not merely the action that mattered but the fact that the decisions were taken by the people and that the action group worked as a supportive element. The discussions and reflection on the forest question that formed part of this study were an important step both in helping the people to come together around a specific issue and the action group taking stock of the situation and better understanding its supportive role. However, this is only one step and we still have a long way to go.

In Himachal Pradesh, on the contrary, for two of the three groups this study was the first of its kind. It was through this that the people were introduced to any form of community organisation whatsoever. It was the first time they were faced with an issue of common concern. For these and other reasons the impact was more limited than in Orissa but hopefully more lasting since it was the beginning in a new direction which they had not thought of earlier.

Ownership of knowledge

The extent of enthusiasm any action generates among the people and the way they get involved in it could be an indication of the way they claim the ownership of that action (Fernandes and Tandon 1981: 4-5). In a study of this type,

an indication of ownership would be the attendance of the people at meetings convened, their active participation in the discussion, their willingness to take decisions and implement them.

As far as our study is concerned, in Orissa interest and enthusiasm were extremely low both among the animators and the people when we were doing the individual interviews. Both seem to have viewed it as a study done by the researchers. Its ownership was with us. However, as the study progressed and group discussion and reflection on specific issues began, in some groups there was much greater involvement of the people in the discussion and in follow up action.

In at least one case real enthusiasm was generated not by oral discussion but by film strips the animators showed during group meetings. As the study progressed, definite steps were taken by the people in at least four areas to appropriate to themselves the ownership of this study.

One cannot say with any certainly that the ownership has been transferred to the people but only that the first steps have been taken in this direction. Among the obstacles to the transfer of ownership of knowledge to the people were the external deadlines and the individual interviews. Though the questionnaires were formulated with the people, their involvement at that stage as well as in the earlier discussion on areas of study was minimal. The people as well as the investigators viewed it only as an academic exercise whose ownership remained with the Institute of Research.

In Orissa the fact that the action group or the investigator was known to the people gave them the type of credibility required to initiate a process of mobilisation when group discussions began. The same cannot be said about two out of three areas of Himachal Pradesh where the animators were absolutely new to the people. These organisations themselves were known as academic institutions that conducted adult literacy classes. Consequently, even the investigators did not have any prior experience in this type of approach. Besides, the forest issue was of lesser concern to the people than in Orissa.

However, at this stage at least in a few areas the people and the animators working among them see the need of good data based surveys both for their own understanding of the situation and for preparing professional reports needed for negotiations with the macro decision makers and for building pressure on them. Thus we see the possibility and even the need of combining these methodologies. But we are still searching for a method of using the traditional questionnaires and individual schedules as a tool for mobilisation.

Ongoing activity

An important criterion to judge the effectiveness of participatory research is whether it has triggered off a chain reaction leading to action that will in some way lead to the empowerment of the people (Fernandes 1981: 40-41). In fact this is an important difference from conventional research to which application of its findings is extrinsic. In participatory research on the contrary, action-research-action is an intrinsic and ongoing process. This action continues in an even more intensified manner once the research proper is completed. Participatory research, therefore, could be quantified on the basis of the extent of action that is set in motion by it and more particularly by the action that continues to be taken even after the project proper is completed. The duration and type of action could be the other parameters in this quantification (Tandon 1981: 26).

It should be clear by now that some groups in Orissa have suceeded in combining action with research and have been effective in mobilising the people. We have discussed the type of action and the factors that helped it in Orissa and prevented it in Himachal Pradesh. If carefully nurtured, the type of activity that was launched can be of great significance in the struggle of the forest dwellers.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have analysed the main stages of the forest study through which we have attempted to identify the process, the outcome and the constraints of participatory

research. We have studied the possibility of combining the CR and PR methodologies to suit the needs of the people. We have seen that such a combination is possible if a proper balance is kept between internal dynamics and external inputs and if the constraints can be dealt with. A combination of these elements can lead to greater participation of the people and to the growth of the community of the oppressed. In order to better understand this question we shall now try to understand what factors determine people's participation.

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Factors Determining People's Participation

We have, in the three preceding chapters, discussed various types of research and the role people play in each of them. We have noticed that while traditional research reproduces the present pattern of development, in making research relevant to the people we do not have to make a dichotomy between the conventional and participatory methodologies. A combination of the two is needed if participatory research is to go beyond micro-involvement to influence macro-decisions and policies that today marginalise the weaker sections. Consequently, if research has to make some sense to the people, then it has to facilitate their participation. It is in order to study this relevance that we analysed the three forest studies.

For instance in Himachal Pradesh the choice of two of the three groups was determined by the non-availability of other groups in the area. These two groups being affiliated to a formal academic institution viz. a university, were found to be ideologically incompatible and strategically inexperienced. Absence of these two primary pre-requisites perhaps contributed to the lack of deeper commitment to the issue. Similarly, three groups in Orissa had very little sense of the involvement of the people in their work. Their presence caused a great amount of tension in the course of the study. Had we sensed this discrepancy early enough, we could have avoided this tension concerning their participation, leadership of the study etc.

Somewhat related to the question of ideological differences is also the problem of external motivation. This could influence the decision of the group to join in the research project. These external motives could be prestige, availability of funds for the study, etc. These too can vitiate the entire process and may be discovered only at an advanced stage of the study when one can neither proceed nor withdraw. To some extent this was the position in Chattisgarh. Needless to state that the study should not be imposed on any group. It should be left absolutely voluntary. Yet there is a place for external motivation. It is at this stage that lack of care may result in groups with ulterior motives joining the study and vitiating the atmosphere. Discretionary sifting is called for in the selection of groups to ensure that the study becomes a tool for mobilisation and that time is not lost on personality conflicts.

In the screening of the investigators, it seems important to keep this criterion of ideological compatibility in mind. Except for a few cases, most of the investigators were selected on the basis of convenience which probably accounts for the low motivation of a few of them.

Prior knowledge of the groups

Prior knowledge of the action groups has its practical significance in the selection and inclusion of groups. Since participatory research has its own characteristic ideology and strategy, it is greatly affected by that of the group that implements this methodology. Further, the group's organisational structure, its intra-group and inter-group relationship, have an important role to play in the entire process. Rivalry within the group affects internal relationships adversely which in turn have a telling effect on the progress of the participatory research process and on the group's own work of people's organisation (Joseph and Desrochers 1985: 55). For instance, due to lack of good inter-personal relationship within the group, some investigators in Orissa could not attend the general meetings wherein the progress of the study was shared, discussed and analysed and plans for the future were

drawn up. They were thus unable to follow the progress of mobilisation in other groups in the course of the study or know the problems the others faced. Though research personnel visited them, their absence at these meetings made monitoring the process more difficult. Many of these problems could have been avoided if we had a longer contact with these groups. It would have enabled us either to exclude them from the study or find ways of dealing with these negative factors.

Rapport with groups

Such contact is essential if the research organisation is to establish good rapport with the group which is an important determinant of their participation and of the researchers' credibility. This is essential for the mutual benefit of the research organisation and of the groups. If this prior mutual familiarity is lacking, much precious time is lost in each trying to know the other as an acceptable partner in the project. For instance, for a long time during the Forest Study, the action groups in Chattisgarh were trying to figure out whether the Indian Social Institute was really interested in people's movements in undertaking this study or whether it was merely using this opportunity and the action group infrastructure to study an issue and publish a report in its name. This problem was felt also with some groups in Orissa but was much more in Chattisgarh.

Group awareness

"What one does not have one cannot give" seems as true here as anywhere else. It has been observed in the course of the study in the three areas, that the degree of awareness created among the people is directly proportionate to that of the group itself. Hence if the activists rank low in awareness, the mobilisation among the people will be proportionately low (Hollnsteiner 1982: 45-461).

In other words, the work of participatory research and of external facilitators is to sustain local efforts, not replace them. By saying this, one does not idolise indigenous efforts

or state that all movement has to come exclusively from within the community and that outsiders have no role whatever to play. One is aware that

> the participatory character of indigenous efforts may vary. However, notwithstanding its participatory character, an indigenous movement may not, in all cases, immediately acquire some other desirable attributes which might give its efforts greater strength and vitality (Rahman 1984: 5).

If the research organisation does not begin with the strength of the local group and people, it runs the risk of turning the study into a purely academic exercise without the participants getting any lasting benefits. It is equally possible that there will be some mobilisation in the area as a result of the study. However, if the local group is not sufficiently aware, there is every possibility of its becoming only *ad hoc* mobilisation which will not be sustained once the researcher leaves. Hence the people can be easily suppressed by the local vested interests. By saying this,

> it is not being implied that having an organisation the people would necessarily have had greater success in their specific struggle than they actually had, but it can be argued that this could have increased their relative strength in their struggles. However, in a more basic sense, *ad hoc* mobilisation can hardly bring any lasting benefit—social development is an organised process in which only organised entities may integrally participate, and a social group or class which has not become such an entity naturally tends to be left out of this process (ibid: 5-6).

This has been a very consistent observation of the groups. Although there was a gradual but perceptible increase in awareness about the forest issue in the groups, even towards the end of the study one could not fail to notice the varying degrees of awareness. This was clearly reflected in the grater or lesser involvement of the people and in the degrees of consciousness both within an area as between different groups in Orissa and between areas i.e. Orissa, Chattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh.

Role of the in-field coordinator

The local coordinator who is an activist of the place chosen by the voluntary agencies as liaison person has a major role to play if the experimental study is to be of use to the people. As a local person, the coordinator is in a good position to guide the investigators in their work. He acts as a liaison between the local groups and the research organisation. As the person on the spot, he should be able to convey the exact objectives and methodology of research to the groups and to individual investigators. He has to ensure standardisation of individual interviews to maintain their reliability, ensure that the investigators facilitate the participation of the biggest possible number in the discussion etc.

For this to happen, the coordinator has to understand the entire process properly and communicate it intelligibly to the investigators. Furthermore, to avoid any interference of external factors, such as personal differences, the person should be acceptable to all the groups. The function therefore of the coordinator, demands that he/she be thoroughly familiar with the techniques of traditional research methodology so that all forms of systematic bias that raise doubts about the reliability and validity of the data are fully controlled to the extent possible. Similarly he/she should know the participatory techniques. The coordinator therefore forms a bridge between conventional and participatory research. Moreover, he/she should know how to deal with the local activists without imposing his/her views on them. This implies that apart from the qualities discussed above that constitute the criteria on the basis of which a coordinator may be selected, everything possible should be done to avoid making this an issue for an inter-group power struggle. Such a struggle may only serve to introduce division during the research process when the study should be an instrument to bring the groups together.

A major drawback in the Himachal Pradesh forest study was the absence of an in-field coordinator with whom the research team could have been in constant contact. Thus an ongoing monitoring system could not be ensured. The Orissa and

Chattisgarh studies had local coordinators. But contenders to the post created dissension in the initial stages and we took time to get over this handicap. Besides, because it was an experimental methodology, and owing to lack of time, we were not very clear on the type of training the coordinators had to be given. We realise from hindsight that precisely because of these reasons the local coordinators chosen from among the activists needs to be given a much more thorough grounding both in the traditional and participatory methodology than would be required under normal circumstances.

Role of the investigator

For the twin objective of mobilisation in the field and change of macro-policies to be attained, the role of the local investigator is crucial because of his/her familiarity with the people and the area. The external researchers have to supplement these advantages by giving them adequate training in the methods of interviewing and in modes of mobilisation and familiarise them with the issues concerned. Their training should also focus on folklore and its appropriate use in a participatory methodology. Without this background knowledge of their own folklore, of the methodology and of the subject matter, they will not be able to adequately weave the local ethos into the fabric of a participatory process. It is important that the control of knowledge does not remain in the hands of the external researcher (White 1982: 31-32). The best intermediaries the research organisation has in transferring knowledge to the people are the local co-ordinators and investigators. Hence it is imperative for the external researchers to invest sufficient time and energy in training them adequately.

Because of external deadlines, insufficient attention was paid to this aspect in the early stages of our studies. Time and again the investigators noted that their training in both these areas was inadequate which, they remarked, was responsible to a large extent for their inability to stimulate the critical consciousness of the people. A better knowledge of the forest and the historical development of the forest policy would have facilitated their work considerably.

We were able to get over some of these handicaps in the course of the Orissa study, thanks to the regular meeting we had with the investigators and visits to the groups. But the investigators felt that these visits were inadequate and that the meetings could overcome these handicaps only partially. This understanding improved as the study progressed and was more effective when they were dealing with familiar aspects such as folklore. One group was able to use slides on forests very effectively. These experiences only confirm our hypothesis that the methodology we experimented with has the potential to combine mobilisation with a professionally acceptable report. But it requires much more investment of time and energy than we did, in the training of local investigators.

Another aspect which could have hindered mobilisation in the early stages viz. during individual interviews, was lack of prior contact of the investigators with the villages in which interviewes were contacted. We have stated that during individual interviews we could only concentrate on data collection and did not succeed in the mobilisation of the people around the forest issue. It is because in order to ensure the 'scientific' credibility of the data, the groups either appointed a new person to do the study in a village they were working in or sent one of their existing animators to a village with which they were not quite familiar. Consequently, though the group had credibility with the villagers the investigator did not have it. In some cases the investigators took a long time to win the confidence of the people and gain credibility. In at least one case in Orissa initially the investigator was mistaken for a government official. The people expressed their contempt for government officials by throwing stones at him. Finally, by meeting the village leaders etc. he was able to establish his identity. Once this was accomplished he had no difficulty in proceeding with the project. In fact the people expressed their regrets at their behaviour by being very cooperative. However, the experience of most investigators was that it was easier for them to win the confidence of the people of their own village than in an absolutely new one.

After these experiences we are convinced that even from a 'scientific' point of view, it is easier to ensure the objectivity of the data if the investigators are familiar with the people and the area than by sending them to a new area. It is a challenge for the outside researcher to find ways of getting over any possible bias that may be caused by this familiarity. We are convinced after this and other experiences both in academic and participatory research, that the best objectivity comes from members of a community who know it from within, are committed to the growth of its people and yet are able to take a distance from their surroundings and analyse their situation scientifically.

While familiarity can help objectivity, there are moments when it can be an obstacle to the acceptance of the investigators by the community and consequently to mobilisation. This problem is caused by the traditional culture that assigns a subordinate role to women or the youth and by the dominant culture that assigns greater value and objectivity to an outside 'scholar' than to the local people. Such, for example, was our experience with a group in Himachal Pradesh where the investigators were local girls in their early twenties. Men, particularly the elders, reacted negatively to them and refused to attend meetings convened by them. They expressed in no uncertain terms that their own *local girls* could not teach them anything more than what they already knew.

The girls in their turn state that their age did make a difference with elderly women. They added that because they were women, the other women felt much more comfortable with them than they would have with a male investigator. This shows the importance of taking the local culture into consideration while planning a study. But it is important for the researcher not to accept these values of inequality but attempt initial compromise in order to use the study to get over them. At this stage we would not be able to say how exactly it can be done. Further research is required on this question.

Prior knowledge of the sample areas

These experiences also show the need of the researchers

familiariting themselves with the local situation. The 'local ethos' mentioned earlier should form a part and parcel of the very design of the study. Most mistakes we made in Chattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh were caused by our lack of familiarity not merely with the action groups but also with the area itself. Such knowledge would have aided us in designing a more effective plan for the study in Himachal Pradesh where the village formation (set up) is quite different from that of Orissa or Madhya Pradesh. Given the geographical conditions and undulating landscape, a design more suited to this state would have yielded better results. In Chattisgarh and Orissa, with a better knowledge of the area, we would not have scheduled interviews during the monsoons when some places become inaccessible. With a better knowledge of the areas, it would have been possible to find alternate ways of keeping the minimum contact with the groups in H.P. with whom all contact was lost during winter when the state is inaccessible. Lack of even the minimum contact was a major obstacle to mobilisation

Similarly, prior knowledge of the local ethos, songs, legends, myths, customs, social, political and economic structures etc. helps to integrate these in the project decision and make it an integral part of the entire process. The absence of this aspect was felt in the initial stages of the forest study. In Orissa, group meetings enabled us to become aware of this shortcoming and take remedial measures. Hence some groups were able to use folklore as a tool for building up the tribal community. Much more could have been achieved had we been conscious of it earlier.

For mobilisation to be effective it is important to choose an issue with which the people can identify themselves. Sometimes the outsider may view an issue as important but the people may need some time to view it as such. As far as the forest study was concerned, in Orissa and Chattisgarh some groups were already rallying the people round the question of forests and they hoped that the study would support them. Some others were searching for an issue to rally the people round and found one in the forest question. This was possible because forests form an integral part of the

people's life and are perceived by them as a matter of life and death, and any change in the forest policy etc. has drastic repercussions on their lifestyle.

In Himachal Pradesh on the other contrary, forests are not perceived as a matter of life and death since practically every household owns some bit of land. Though forests are essential for their livelihood, they perceive them only as providing three needs (i) fuel wood for cooking and heating (2) fodder and (3) timber for house construction, which is in fact regulated by the Timber Distribution (TD) legislation. Their main income comes from the apple orchards. Hence their leaders are relatively little concerned with the fate of the forests. Since awareness of the issue was somewhat low, it was difficult to get the people involved in Himachal Pradesh.

Literacy level of the people

One major handicap we found while doing individual interviews was the use of a literate medium with a population that was largely illiterate. In Orissa and Chattisgarh literacy was below 5% in many villages. The investigatos had to keep questioning the people and write at the same time. This was probably an obstacle to an ongoing discussion (though we could not confirm it). We only observed in Himachal Pradesh that the awareness among the literates who were able to fill their own questionnaires, was qualitiatively better than that of the illiterates whose schedules were filled by the investigators while they were being interviewed. It is possible that there are other variables that expose literates to the outside world and enable them to be aware of issues concerning their situation more than illiterates. Amid all these variables, the role of literacy needs to be studied.

We are of the opinion that though literacy helps, it is not essential for awareness building. what is important is to find alternatives suitable to illiterates. The paper and pencil approach does not look advisable with illiterates who are not used to it, unlike the literates who in all probability felt a bit more comfortable with it. Perhaps a reduction of this discomfort caused by the paper-pencil approach would have improved

their response. Moreover, any undue importance given to literacy can increase the male-female distance since illiteracy is much higher among women than among men. In order to ensure proper filling of schedules, the researcher may be tempted to choose mostly male investigators, thus excluding women from the process.

People's involvement increased considerably where the group used other educational aids such as slides, flip charts, role plays etc. Careful preparation of these along with an appropriate commentary can be very useful in initiating a discussion and capturing the interest of the villagers. It also helps to concretise the issue and thus make it more intelligible to them. This may be one of the alternatives and this need was reiterated by many. However, because of time and other constraints these aids could not be made available to the investigators during the study. The groups that did make use of these techniques found them extremely useful.

Fixed deadlines

Unlike in conventional research, fixed deadlines are a little more difficult to handle in participatory research since it is a rather slow process that cannot be unduly hastened. It has its own pace and therefore fixing strict deadlines as in conventional research is unrealistic. The pace of the people needs to be taken into account, and the researcher ought to be highly sensitive to these dynamics.

One also needs to consider the availability of the people to take part in the programmes. Being employed in the fields or forests or in contract labour, they are busy for the better part of the day and their availability for such meetings etc. is restricted to late evenings when they are tired. Besides, women have to do housework and may be unable to come. Furthermore, their availability is seasonal in the sense that their work is determined by the different seasons. They are more available in some seasons than in others and these months should be used for meetings.

We view this as our major failure which conditioned most other handicaps. We were working on externally fixed deadlines which forced us to accelerate the process. Moreover, the

Indian Social Institute was working on two studies viz. in Orissa and Chattisgarh at the same time. This, together with seasonal inaccessibility, prevented us from visiting the study area as often as we would have liked to, if this method was to be used as a tool for mobilisation, not merely as a mode of gathering data. When such deadlines and problems of access do exist, as they often do, the research team along with the local investigator should devise ways to circumvent them so that the programme does not suffer.

Such alternatives are important because, for the study to be effective, while the investigator is engaged in monitoring the process in the village, there is need for the research team to keep a constant check on the entire process. This is true particularly for individual interviews. The ideal would be for at least one of the members to be present with the group till the investigator is comfortable with the research methodology. This is also an important function of the in-field coordinator. Such visits are important because in the course of the study many unforeseen problems arise which the investigators are not equipped to handle. If the investigators do not get timely help they tend to resort to the convenient way out which can have negative effects on the entire study. Besides, visits by the research team serve as a morale booster to the investigators and help to keep their motivation high. The villagers too appreciate very much a visit by an outsider to their village and take it as an honour. This therefore helps to raise their interest in the study and by transference, helps to improve the image and credibility of the local investigator.

Pre-occupation with data collection

Because of the necessity of data collection in accordance with the objectives of the research project and given the handicaps we were working under, there grew a tendency to over-emphasise this aspect of the project during the individual interview stage. One should add that at the same time the importance of this stage should not be under-estimated. The crucial problem here is the collection of reliable and valid data without drawing one's attention away from people's mobilisation. Over-emphasis on one can diminish the impact

of the other. While at the individual interview stage the focus will have necessarily to be on data, everything possible should be done to improve the mobilisation process too. It is in order to improve this, that we feel the need of finding alternate methods of individual data collection. The one used for the Forest Study was the face-to-face interview technique with the help of a semi-structured questionnaire. First, as to the size of the questionnaire: if it is too lengthy it can become counter-productive. The average span of attention of a respondent being rather short. he/she tends to get tired and is not in a mood for discussion. Second, the interview should not be conducted at one stretch which involves that there are no pressing deadlines. Third, although for the sake of standardisation certain questions need to be formulated in a structured manner, the investigator should be sufficiently familiar with the text of the questionnaire so as to reduce the formal aspect of the interview to the minimum. He/she should be able to pose the questions without looking at the schedule in such a way as to make the interview appear informal while at the same time keeping to the standardised formulation of the questions. It is also essential that the investigators reduce the gap between themselves and the respondents and win over their confidence before any answers from the respondent can become acceptable from the point of view of reliability and validity. In the Forest Studies in some cases the data collection was rushed through without paying much attention to these preliminaries. Hence a few investigators, particularly in Himachal Pradesh, faced a lot of opposition from the villagers.

Conclusion

We have seen the main factors that facilitate people's mobilisation through participatory research. We insist that we do not have all the answers. At this stage we have more questions than answers. But what is clear is that this type of combination of methodologies can be used to achieve people's participation and the growth of the community.

Many questions still need to be answered. In particular, the question on the role of women in this type of mobilisation deserves more attention than we have been able to give in the

course of these studies. That also brings us to the question of the role of external faciliators. If the local activists are not yet prepared to deal with these questions, should the external researcher impose such a subject on them or are there other ways of helping them to evolve? Some of these questions are still to find answers and the search has to continue.

6

Conclusion: Some Questions on Alternatives

It has been alluded to earlier that participatory research does not end with the completion of the study proper. It begins with the initiation of the study, gathers momentum as it progresses and the process accelerates once it is completed. This may be attributed to the nature of the final stage of the study which consists in the dissemination of information gathered. As a result of the entire process that the people have gone through, as well as due to the scientific nature of the joint discoveries made and evidence gathered, this feed-back to the people comes to acquire much greater value. They feel within themselves their inner strength which this entire process has been instrumental in creating. As a result, they feel confident to implement their plan of action thus turning participatory research into an ongoing process. If on the other hand, the outcome of this process is lethargy and a sense of disillusionnment, then one might safely conclude that participatory research has failed as an alternative methodology.

With this background, we shall now briefly review the impact of participatory research in Orissa, Chattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh.

Achievements

1. In some districts of Orissa people have shown initiative in enthusiastically taking up concrete measures regarding

the preservation, protection and development of the forest.

2. One observes greater mobilisation not only of the people but also of the groups especially of those members who were initially only marginally involved.

3. In addition to the direct effects of the forest project itself, it has been instrumental in creating a sense of unity among the action groups involved in the study. They were able to know each other better since they met often and were able to take some concrete steps towards the strengthening of their common platform or federation viz. Orissa Action groups. Many problems remain but a beginning has been made.

4. Apart from those directly involved in the project, where there was sufficient mobilisation, it has also made a perceptible impact on the other people of the neibhbouring towns and villages. For instance, in at least one area we heard people talking about the forest issue in tea shops and other places. In itself it might seem trivial but, in course of time, its impact on the attitudes etc. of the general public can be significant. Participatory research as a process does not claim neutrality nor does it seek to remain neutral. It necessarily brings about a polarisation in the area. On one end of this polarisation are the marginalised and on the other are the vested interests. Participatory research perhaps helps bring out this rather latent polarisation in bold relief. This type of impact can facilitate such polarisation and help the marginalised groups to come together.

5. Another significant effect of participatory research has been, as was stated earlier, the demystification of knowledge in the understanding of the people. In a few cases not only have the so called 'illiterates' begun to feel at ease with such research projects but they have even come to acquire a certain amount of independence in this regard. In Kalahandi district for instance, a group of local leaders that did not have more than middle and high school education, has taken the initiative to undertake a survey in their area to study certain relevant issues. The probability of many more such

groups springing up is high if the demystifying and demonopolishing character of participatory research is given sufficient importance.

Some questions

While speaking of these achievements, one also has to add that many questions concerning participatory research still remain unanswered. Many dilemmas still remain. These have been mentioned in some form or the other earlier. Here we only formulate them more precisely.

1. If participatory research is not to be imposed upon people, along with the issue that it deals with, is one to wait until the people themselves feel the need to tackle the problem and only after they express the need approach them and support them in their effort? Or is it not an integral function of participatory research to create this awareness and make the people see the need for a change in the *status quo?* This assumes that the need is lying dormant and unexpossed in the people. Hence participatory research does not impose it but helps clarify and articulate it.

In the case of the forest studies, the initiative emerged during a dialogue between the research organisation and the action groups. The people got involved in it much later—only when they viewed it as an issue that affected their life intimately. This was the case in parts of Orissa where the people were feeling the problem. But the question we ask ourselves is whether we should not have waited till the feeling was intensified among the people and whether it would have been much more effective if we had facilitated the intensification of this feeling before attempting to mobilise opinion through participatory research. Had we attempted such a process, we would probably have realised early enough that it would be difficult to use the forest issue as a tool for mobilisation in Himachal pradesh.

2. The question becomes much more relevant in the choice of areas of study. We left the choice of areas completely to the local activists. With each group adding study areas that were relevant in their region, it became a massive

questionnaire and the schedule became too long for ordinary villagers. Secondly, some very important questions were left out. For example, the action groups being by and large male-dominated, the activists did not think of having a section on the role of women in the informal forest dweller economy.

What role should the external researchers play in this situation? Should they open a dialogue on these questions or should they allow the action groups to go ahead with their choice and help them to evolve at a later stage? We realise that both the length of the questionnaire and the absence of a section on women are major lacunae in our study. We tried to introduce the question on the role of women in the course of the study, but with limited success, Now we have begun a new study on "women and Forests." The absence of this component seems to have affected the follow up action of some groups. For example, in many community forestry projects that came after this study, one notices a predominance of fruit and other income generating trees and not many fodder and fuel trees which women need. Decisions seem to have been taken exclusively by men.

3. Can the gap between conventional research and participatory research be completely bridged? Or is conventional research necessarily to precede participatory research? Can it follow participatory research when the people feel the need? In other words is an integration of the two methodologies possible or have we to be satisfied with merely keeping them adjacent to each other? We work on the assumption that such an integration is possible and we have begun a study on "Land Alienation in Tribal Orissa" according to this understanding. At this stage we do not have any definite conclusion.

4. Action groups or other local voluntary organisations had an essential role to play in our research design. Are we to conclude from this that research is to be restricted only to those areas where action groups are operating? Are other areas, where no party or non-party political formation has broken ground and where it might be imperative to initiate this process, going to be left out, simply because of the absence of groups there? In other words, is the selection of

the area and consequently, the initiation of the participatory process, going to be restricted or determined by the presence of groups in the area? If researchers are to go directly to the people, how are they to enter the area? Very few researchers have any such experience and they need to experiment with new approaches.

The different factors discussed here could contribute to minimise the gap and to increase the effectiveness of participatory research as an alternative to the conventional approach. Careful attention to all these factors while designing the project would aid greatly in improving the impact of participatory research. All these factors have been gleaned from our experiences gained through various studies. We surely do not exhaust all the factors that affect participatory research as an alternative methodology. Studies of a different nature will perhaps highlight a few more of these ualidating factors.

In these chapters we have discussed the factors which we attempted in these studies. They concern mainly the micro-macro perspective of PR. Too many persons involved in PR restrict it only to mobilisation which is a micro-phenomenon. Not many have attempted the type of research that combines the two. Social change cannot be restricted to the local level. To be effectives it has to acquire a much broader dimension. Without such support, it is easy for the local vested interests to suppress those who attempt any deviation from the *status quo*.

> Political power is first a local reality. From this level information flows up to higher levels where it is so easily believed that 'Naxalites' have come to instigate people and threaten law and order. It is sufficient for some local paper to print a distorted report about the disturbance of peace by some group 'come from outside,' to make their existence in the area almost impossible. Raids by the police, imprisonment and beatings have taken place. More often, however, it is the people who get the punishment (Volken 1984: 120).

In this situation, the question we had to ask ourselves

was whether participotory research did not have an obligation to go beyond local mobilisation and provide macro-support. A report understood by the decision-makers, an attempt to provide authentic information from the field to the policy makers and an effort to influence policy decisions was part of this macro-support we tried to provide to the local groups. Combination of methodologies was a logical outcome of this decision since we had to combine field-level involvement with macro-level decisions.

The micro-macro perspective is but one of the many questions before PR— and very few have tried to face it. Another important question PR has to face concerns the role of history. The micro-macro problem concerns present day developments. Beyond the present, there is also history. By limiting itself to mobilisation, PR does not seem to take the role of history seriously. People's attitudes, the explooitative system and the socio-economic srructures have a definite history. No social change can be effective unless this history forms part of the mobilisation process. And participatory research, to be meaningful, has to evolve a methodology of combining the present with the past.

Obviously the question arises about the type of history one is to depend on. It cannot be the dynastic history taguht in schools since it views the world exclusively from the point of view of the dominant sections and thinks of the people only as subordinates. Concentration only on dominant history can confirm the people in their state of powerlessness. It is important to begin with popular oral history and interpret dominant history from this perspective.

Besides, one may have to reflect on the role of theories of history like dialectical materialism. What role do these ideologies play in PR? Similarly, the place of other factors like popular religiosity and culture needs to be studied. As more experience is gained in the participatory approach, more light will probably be thrown on these dilemmas and questions and a clearer concept will hopefully emerge for the benefit of the people.

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Participatory Research and Evaluation: Experiments in Research as a Process of Liberation. Walter Fereandes and Rajesh Tandon (eds.) 1982 (Reprint), pp. 216. Rs 25

Based on experiences and experiments in different parts of the country, this book presents a data based perspective on participative research and evaluation as an integral tool in the process of liberation.

Based on the experience of three action research projects on 'Forests, Environment and Forest Dweller Economy,' this monograph discusses the pioneering methodological attempt at integrating the participatory process with conventional research methods. Participatory research tended to remain a localised mobilisation of the people and has not succeeded in reaching the macro-level which is essential if it is to become a tool for social change. These studies were attempts at taking participatory research beyond the micro-level and this monograph analyses the methodological issues that arose in the process. This is a contribution to the debate on the relevance of research to people's movements.

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